



The Atkins Family

Jason, Emily, Savannah,
Nathaniel, and Miriam

Serving in Guinea-Bissau,
West Africa

August 2025

Jason and Savannah
return and the
monsoons are keeping
us on our toes!

Dark Skies *by Jason*

Sometimes people make well-intentioned comments to us along the lines of "I couldn't imagine doing what you do." I usually hear that as an encouragement, but sometimes I wonder if we tend to gloss over our hard days. I hope not, but in case you can't imagine us having a breaking point, let me tell you about the last few days.

Savannah and I returned to Canchungo after a multi-day trip that involved a train, three flights, a couple of buses, and a bush taxi. I was jet-lagged, had missed a couple nights of sleep along the six-day trip, and knew there were a few broken things waiting for me (the well pump and internet connection at the house.) Aside from that, my construction crew had done most of the work I left for them, and were ready for some new marching orders. Emily had been a champion while I was away, making it all work as best she could, including collecting rain from the eaves of the house and drawing the rest of the needed water by hand from the well. I knew she was tired as well, though. It was great to get back home and wonderful to have our family together again.

The monsoons are in full swing, and within a few days of getting back, while our family was passing around a cold, we had a couple of very cloudy, drizzly days in a row. That evening, as the rain poured, I was fighting back water leaking across the floor of the new shop (full of moisture-sensitive equipment), my office, and the storage room. While I was using a broken squeegee and a shop-vac to try to keep the water at bay, I got a call from Emily that the solar power system at the house had shut off because the battery was empty, starting a 4-hour countdown to the food in the fridge starting to spoil. As I continued to battle the water, the power at the site also ran out, leaving me without the shop-vac and with only my cell phone light. I grabbed a battery powered shop-vac and kept at it until that battery also ran out.

Fortunately, the rain started to let up and I was able to catch up with the water on the floor. I buzzed home on the motorcycle (whose starter broke a few months ago and now needs to be bump started, which is tricky when all of the ground is wet mud!) because our truck is still broken. I got home soaked, changed and had a quick dinner, slapped together a spare battery, inverter, and transformer to keep the fridge going overnight (a combination I'd never tried before), and then prepared to go back to the site to be ready for the 2.5" of rain predicted between 1am and 3am. I was exhausted and confess I was ready to throw in the towel.

Fortunately, the overnight rain never materialized and I was able to sleep in my own bed rather than a cot in the shop. The next day brought some hours of good sun with which we were able to recharge the system at the site (which happens quickly because of there being so many panels) and the next couple of batteries to keep the (cont'd)



We've been limping the house electricity along by charging lithium-ion batteries at the site (where we have space for extra solar panels) and swapping two of them a day to keep the fridge and internet going.



With the shop half-finished, doors which will eventually be interior are letting rain water under them from the unroofed section.



We added some temporary flashing to help mitigate roof leaks that are a result of the central section of the shop roof not being there yet.

Dark Skies (cont'd) by Jason

(...) fridge powered while the house system gradually recovered over the next few days. I rebuilt the well pump at the house, and now we have running water again. After finding squirrel damage to one of the temporary network cables that carry the internet to the radio tower that beams it to our house, I was also able to restore the connection to the house.

While I'm still digging out from all of the things that need my attention, drying out and a good night's sleep did a lot to improve my attitude. Sometimes I wish God's reminders that I can't do things in my own strength would be a little gentler, but I'm not sure I'd hear them if they were subtle. It's been a hard week, but the sun always comes back out eventually!



I was able to successfully rebuild the well pump at the rental house using parts we flew back with. The well is a petri dish of nasty bacteria. Glad we have a good water filter!

Entropy by Jason

One of the aspects that excites us about the site's construction is the opportunity to build spaces that will protect equipment from the harsh environment here. I was reminded of this in by seeing the opposite situation in several different cases this last month. As I noted last month, we've accelerated removing equipment from the old shop now that its solar power system has been damaged and isn't going to be able to power our equipment anymore. Unfortunately, both of our mobile heavy lifters, integral to the process, went down. The Cat skid steer developed some kind of electrical problem while we were gone. It currently lives in a covered but open garage bay while the second closed bay of the garage stores construction material. I can't help but wonder if it had been stored inside if this problem would still have developed. The other, the electric forklift that can only operate on



This poor workbench was just brought to the site from the old shop, where termites had ravaged it.

smooth concrete, stopped working as we were unloading cabinets coming back from the old shop. I later figured out that humidity had corroded an electrical connection, fortunately an easy fix. One of the things we brought back from the old shop is a wooden workbench which termites had all but destroyed. Termites are endemic over there because of the way the building was built, but shouldn't be an issue in the new shop. We're looking forward to being able to keep things better protected!



Our aged electric walk-behind forklift stopped working because someone used a steel washer long ago that corroded instead of the proper brass one in an electrical connection! Fortunately, an easy fix after discovering the problem.



The Cat developed a problem while sitting the month we were away. We're missing it while I search for a way to fix it!



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